

U.S. Patent App. No. 09/647,659
Docket: 033082.052

REMARKS

Upon entry of the amendments, claims 1 and 3-18 will be pending in the application. Applicants request reconsideration of the rejections detailed in the Office Action based upon the following comments.

Claim Rejections – 35 U.S.C. § 102

Claims 1, 3-6, 10, 11, and 14-16 are rejected as being anticipated by Akimoto (US 5,803,932).

Independent claim 1 has been amended to clarify the invention. This claim now details that the alignment mechanism detects “an orientation-flat of the substrate” and aligns “the orientation-flat to a predetermined direction by causing the substrate to rotate”.

Akimoto fails to inherently or explicitly disclose these features of claim 1. Akimoto makes no reference to the detection or alignment of an orientation-flat of a substrate. As previously discussed in the prior response, Akimoto discloses a convey mechanism 42 (asserted to be an alignment mechanism in the Office Action) comprising a base 43 and a holder 44. The base 43 can move up and down and can rotate. The holder 44 is mounted on the base 43 and can be moved back and forth. See column 5 lines 45-50 in Akimoto.

Applicants also remind the Examiner that Akimoto fails to disclose that the substrate is transferred from the buffer mechanism to the alignment mechanism so that the center of the substrate is located on the rotational axis of the alignment mechanism.

**U.S. Patent App. No. 09/647,659
Docket: 033082.052**

The holder 44 of Akimoto receives the substrate at a "forth-moved state" based upon the description of column 5 lines 38-53 in Akimoto. The centering results from the wafer being moved against the edges 46 and the positioning members 47 when the wafer is moved to its "rearmost position" by the holder 44, which moves back and forth. See column 5 lines 45-57 in Akimoto.

Due to the foregoing, Applicants submit that independent claim 1 and dependant claims 3-6 are not anticipated by Akimoto.

Likewise, independent claim 10 and the resulting dependant claims (11, and 14-16) are not anticipated by Akimoto. Claim 10 details an alignment means for placing a substrate to be processed onto a stage, for detecting an orientation-flat of the substrate, and for aligning the orientation-flat to a predetermined direction by causing the stage to rotate. This feature is not disclosed in Akimoto.

Claim Rejections-35 U.S.C § 103

Claims 7-9, 12, and 13 are rejected as obvious in light of Akimoto in further view of Somekh (US 5,643,366).

Claim 17 is rejected as obvious in light of Akimoto in combination of Ozawa (US 5,474,410).

Applicants respectfully traverse these rejections because independent claims 1 and 10 are not anticipated or obvious in view of Akimoto.

**U.S. Patent App. No. 09/647,659
Docket: 033082.052**

Furthermore, Applicants respectfully assert that Akimoto should not be considered when determining whether the claims are obvious in light of 103(c). Both Akimoto and the present application are assigned to Tokyo Electron Limited.

Akimoto was filed on April 26, 1995 and was issued on September 8, 1998.

The present application was filed on October 4, 2000 and claims a priority date of April 10, 1998. The Examiner acknowledged receipt of the priority documents in the Office Action that was mailed on December 5, 2001.

As such, Akimoto only qualifies as 102(e) prior art and should not be considered when determining whether an invention sought to be patented is obvious under 35 U.S.C. 103. Applicants request that the obviousness rejections be withdrawn.

**U.S. Patent App. No. 09/647,659
Docket: 033082.052**

CONCLUSION

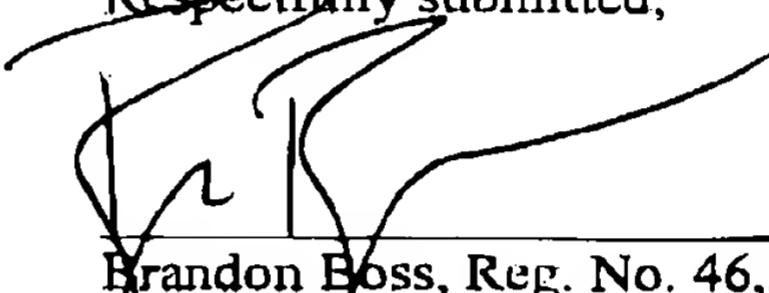
Applicants respectfully assert that this response obviates the rejections detailed in the Office Action and that the application should be allowed.

If any additional fees are due in connection with the filing of this response, such as fees under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17, please charge the fees to Deposit Account No. 02-4300. Any overpayment can be credited to Deposit Account No. 02-4300.

Date: May 19, 2003

Signature:

Respectfully submitted,


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* Practice is limited to matters and proceeding before federal courts and agencies.